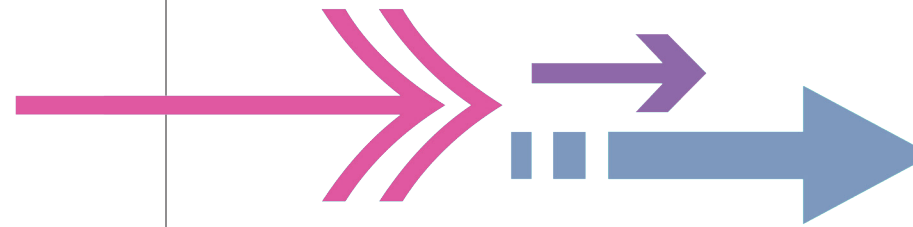


# EXPERIENCE

PRACTICE + THEORY



SPRING  
2018



# FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Friends and Colleagues —

Many years ago, way back in the early 2000s, I was preparing to teach my very first class at the University of Cincinnati — a course titled *Introduction to Interpersonal Communication*. Prior to that first day, many hours were spent preparing lectures and assessments, thinking about ways to engage students. I simply wanted to **be ready** for that first day of school. With shirt and tie laid-out neatly on the dresser, immaculately polished shoes on the floor, I didn't sleep a wink that night prior.

Arriving to campus about two hours early, I freshly cleaned the chalkboard, writing "Instructor Sharp" in big, carefully written letters. I reviewed my notes, checked the course roster, reviewed my notes again, paced back-and-forth in front of the room, and waited for students to trickle into the room. Eventually, I sat down *on* (not *at*) the desk (because cool teachers sit *on* the desk and I desperately wanted to be one).

## Everything was ready to go.

Several more minutes must have passed as one of my mentors, a seasoned colleague in the department, walked into the classroom, observed me sitting alone, and asked, "where are your students?" Looking at my watch, I started to panic because class should have already started. **Where were my students?!** Were all of my students out sick? Did I come on the wrong day or at the wrong time? Nope. I had gone to the wrong classroom.

## Now what?

I'm sitting in an empty classroom with meticulously prepared material to deliver, but no one to deliver it to. After quickly packing-up my belongings, I raced down the hallway to the other side of the building, and ran into the room filled with freshman and sophomore students, all staring back at me, a seemingly unprepared, sweaty, nervous college instructor.

## So, what did I do?

I was honest with the students, telling them that I had gone to the wrong classroom. And then I used that opportunity to teach an important lesson about one of the subjects in the class — the primacy effect — the importance of first impressions. I have never gone to the wrong classroom again but have revisited and shared that lesson in many, many course lectures since.

Something important was learned that day, something that I have internalized and have used to inform what I do both inside and outside of the classroom.

## I learned to improvise, to build the airplane while flying it.

That first-day-of-teaching scramble has something important to say about Experiential Learning, I think, something that may resonate with you. That is, when real and deep learning occurs for our students, we are always adjusting to the changing milieu. We are reflecting upon our actions and acting upon our reflections,

what Donald Schön wrote about in *The Reflective Practitioner*. We are engaged in an iterative process, ever-adapting to a shifting context, often with multiple stakeholders, each with a perpetually intersecting list of needs, hopes, desires, and plans. And our work, the work of experiential learning thinkers and doers, is located in the messy cockpit of that airborne plane.

Can this messiness be frustrating, exhausting, and frightening? Of course, it can be. Perhaps that frustrating messiness is at the heart of what John Dewey termed a *Felt Difficulty*. Even when the airplane is off-the-ground, it is often clunky, slow, and full of holes that are created as quickly as we fill them. More often than not, we need co-pilots for our journey, or at least a really good air traffic control team. Other times we need to be grounded for a bit to get some rest. Every time, however, we look forward to flying again.

As was mentioned in the last issue's letter from the editor, we have set-out to produce a publication that is rich and accessible. We have worked towards reducing the divide between teachers and learners and between campuses and communities. We have strived to help dissolve the false dichotomy between practice and theory, and we have championed traditional forms of experiential learning while also spotlighting new and innovative forms.

This flight crew's hope is that *Experience Magazine* reflects the ever-shifting flight patterns,

adaptive maneuvers, and changing landscapes that we travel across — lessons learned and lessons taught — in the field of experiential education. This issue will share untold stories from the field that invite the curious to pay attention and for scholars, practitioners, teachers, and learners — those inside and outside of the academy — to look inward, look outward, look upward, and, even sometimes, look down.

To say this more simply, the stories you'll find in the pages of this publication are illustrative of the ever-evolving complexity of the incomplete aircraft we call *Experiential Learning*.

Keep building, and safe travels.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Sharp, Editor

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